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Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Watsonville artist Yermo Aranda (right) gathers with several youths that helped him paint a community mural at River Park over the past month during a celebrative dedication ceremony Friday. Ramon Fernandez (from right), Rudy Solorzano, Andreas Lopez and several dozen other youths took part in the fun.

River Park mural ready to view

Pajaro Valley children have big hand in art project

By DAVE BROOKS
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After months of hard work, the River Park mural has finally been finished. Covering the walls of the bathroom building in the middle of the park, the mural acts as a community canvas, using a variety of images to imprint its message on the viewer.

To celebrate the completion of the mural, all the artists who participated in the project attended a party Friday at River Park. In attendance were the young artists themselves, coming to admire the hard work they put into the mural.

"I love all the different colors," said 9-year-old Ramon Fernandez. "When I was helping out it was so difficult for me to decide which colors to use because there were so many options."

Lizette Bedolla (left) and Sarah Sorcia, members of the White Hawk dancers, prepare to take part in several dances during the ceremony.

Spanning all four walls of the rectangular building, the mural interweaves Latino symbols with community images, creating a backdrop that all can relate to.

"I came to the park several times with a little pencil and pad," said head artist Yermo Aranda, "and asked people what kind of images they wanted to see on the wall."

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Aranda has been painting murals in Watsonville for quite some time, professing that this is his 30th mural in the South County. "Wherever I paint a mural," Aranda said, "I always get a lot of requests for mountain lions and wild cats."

After getting approval from the Watsonville City Council and park officials, Aranda had to round up a volunteer force to begin painting.

"The actually painting took only four weeks," Aranda said. "Getting past the red tape and rounding up all the volunteers necessary was the hardest part." After a week of recruiting, Aranda was able to amass an army of children help to complete the painting campaign.

"I'm really happy about the way it turned out," said 9-year-old Rudy Solorzano. "It looks so beautiful."

Solorzano pointed to his favorite part of the mural, a painting of the Virgen de Guadalupe. "She's watches over my family while they work in the field," he said.

"This was the most requested image we had for the mural," Aranda said. "She is the patron saint of fieldworkers. She keeps them safe while they tend to the land." Aranda said that it was this part of the mural that had the most meaning to him. "It's dedicated to the people who work the earth."

Andres Lopez, 10, said that he liked the project because it gave him something fun to do. "I was so happy that we got to paint," he said. "Now I want to be an artist when I grow up." Lopez said his favorite part was using chalk to draw an outline of the mural before it went up. "It was there to guide us, but sometimes we went out of the lines."

The highlight of the afternoon was a dance recital by an Aztec dancing troupe. Lizette Bedolla, 16, one of the dancers in attendance, said the murals would help younger generations understand the values of their community. "It contains so many different meanings," she said. "We want children to study this mural so that it can help them obtain a better understanding of life."

Before completing their first dance entitled "Permiso," dancer Sarah Sorcia, also 16, took a moment to say why she liked the mural. "It shows a lot of Hispanic people immersed with others."

For many children, this was the first time they painted something. "I've never done anything like this before," commented Jesus Felix, 12. "It's good because when you paint the walls with others you learn to communicate and talk," Felix said. "I never thought that it would take this many people."